THE FAIRGATE INN

The house on the hill

❑ Bed and breakfast brings unique look to Camas neighborhood

By Heather Kibbee
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Perched high atop Prune Hill, the mere sight of it can take your breath away.

Landmarked by a stone fountain and surrounded by lush, green grass, a set of six strong, white pillars stand several hundred feet tall — guarding the petite French door entry, highlighted with delicate stained glass.

Just one step inside those unassuming glass doors, and this mansion, built in the style of the Greek-revival period, becomes even more enchanting.

Taking that first step onto the Brazilian cherry-wood entryway, those who enter are beckoned by a grand staircase leading to a sunny veranda. All around, a festival of deep reds accented by gold tones and contrasting colors entertain the eyes. Works of art and art in progress can be found throughout the house in the form of expansive wall murals, intricate frescos, Tiffany-style lamps, antique furniture, and Italian tapestries.

Either close-up or from a distance, Camas' Fairgate Inn Bed and Breakfast is a sight to behold.

The creators of this feast for the senses are Jack and Christine Foyt, residents of the Vancouver area for the past 20 years, and of Camas for the last eight.

On property once owned and habited by well-known resident Dorothy Fox, the Foyts seemed to have built a structure and created an ambiance not commonly found in Camas, or in many other cities in this part of the country, for that matter. With few motels and even fewer bed and breakfasts sited locally, the Fairgate Inn is an entirely unique addition to the Camas area.

The expansive home covers a total of 12,000 square feet with the main rooms consisting of eight guest bedrooms, a ballroom, dining room, living room, library, and kitchen. A carriage house, complete with apartment and garage, has been built behind the main home as well.

Jack Foyt served as the general contractor on the project during its construction while Christine Foyt, who has her decorators license, designed the interior.

"We are striving to have an atmosphere here that is a relaxed atmosphere," Foyt said. "All of the decisions about where this is going to be, and where that is going to work, we did all of that ourselves," Christine Foyt explained.

The Foyts have made every nuance of the inn a reflection of their own taste and personality, an important aspect

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of many similar establishments around the country and the world. An element that drew them to want to own their own bed and breakfast in the first place.

Over the years, the Foyts have owned three restaurants in the Vancouver area, and had been contemplating building their own inn for almost 14 years—since the time the couple stumbled onto an unassuming and unpretentious little bed and breakfast in Redwing, Minn.

"This house was old and it absolutely looked like it was vacant and haunted," Christine Foyt said as she remembered the day she and her husband drove right by the little place not wanting to believe this was the inn where they would spend the night.

But despite their initial assumptions, the bed and breakfast and its innkeepers turned out to be charming — so much so that the Foyt's began to entertain the thought that "some day" they might try it out for themselves.

"It is a completely different experience staying in a B and B," she said. "Each place takes on the feeling of the owners."

"We loved that experience from that point on, and we would always check to see if there was a bed and breakfast available when we traveled," she added.

Then, almost eight years ago, the couple, thinking ahead for retirement, moved to Camas' Lacamas Shores. But while most people want to relax, play golf and travel during their retirement years, it didn't take long for this couple, who have been married for almost 30 years, have five grandchildren and have traveled around the world, to set out on the trail of suitable property for their next adventure — an auspicious undertaking as owners and operators of a bed and breakfast inn.

"It was more than a dream," Christine Foyt said of their conviction follow through with their goal. "We were convinced that if everything worked out, we would be committed to the project."

Following an uphill battle in the search for a perfect spot, that took them all around Clark County, by luck, the Foyt's stumbled across the Dorothy Fox property. "We hadn't really been looking around this area before, and we thought, why not Camas?" Christine Foyt said as she explained the decision to build close to home. "We love Camas, we love living here."

With that, the couple sold their lake view home, and what before had been merely a vision, began to materialize.

"Even before there was a stick of wood on the property I could walk into all of the rooms on the main level," she said. "The difficult part was trying to convince my husband it was going to come out."

Eventually, her husband did catch on, and the couple has been working, compromising, and going through this once-in-a-lifetime experience together ever since.

"We really complement each other in that regard," Christine Foyt said of the roles each has taken on during this process.

From the most mundane chores such as picking bathroom fixtures to more difficult ones like choosing local artists to paint emotion-filled wall murals, for the past two years, both Jack and Christine Foyt have lived and breathed the Fairgate Inn.

"It has just taken energy beyond energy," she said as she rolled her eyes back and threw her arms up in exhaustion.

"I don't know how he did it," Christine Foyt said of her husband, who balanced general contracting duties with those of his "real" job as general manager of Costco in Clackamas. "His job is a very responsible, demanding, pressure-filled job."

"You get into it and you are so committed, but you get tired. We have accomplished so much in a short amount of time," she said proudly. "I am really pleased with the way it is all turning out."

"I really think it will be a benefit to the community," she added. "I think the community will enjoy it."

In addition to serving as a cozy bed and breakfast priced from $110 to $160 per night, the inn will also be used for business retreats and meetings, parties, weddings, and other special events and occasions. Christine Foyt said she hopes to attract guests from the Vancouver and Portland areas, as well as those from Camas and Washougal.

Not ones to step away from something once the hard work is done, the Foyt's plan to be very involved once the bed and breakfast opens officially during the first week in May.

According to Christine Foyt, following two special open house events this week, including Chamber After Hours and a benefit for a Ridgefield man stricken with a rare flesh eating bacteria, once the inn officially opens to guests, she will play hostess in addition to primary chef. The couple will live on the premises in their own "wing" of the home, a 1,600 square foot section on one end of the inn.

"I think of that area as our home, something separate from where our guests will be staying," she said.

But it is that home-like atmosphere that Christine Foyt said she would like to carry thoughout the inn for its guests.

"Back when we stayed at that first bed and breakfast in Redwing, it was the feeling of it that we enjoyed more than anything and that is what we want to create here," she said. "That has been the whole thrust, to make it a place somebody else would want to live in.

"When people come here and stay," she continued. "I want it to be use friendly and comfortable. We are not the Marriot, we don't want to be the Marriot. We want to have our own niche."

And, as the final touches and last-minute construction projects are completed, when asked if there have been any bad experiences over the last two years, Christine Foyt seems to truly have only one that may stick her memory forever.

"I counted, and I think I put up 200 rolls of wallpaper. I don't know if I will ever do any more wallpapering in my life," she said. "I am sick of glue."

Upcoming events at the Fairgate

Two open house events will be held at the Fairgate Inn, 2213 N.W. 23rd, this week.

On Wednesday, from 4:30 to 8 p.m., Chamber After Hours will be held including tours, gourmet refreshments, and entertainment. Cost is $5 for members and $7 for non-members if paid today, or $10 at the door.

On Saturday, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., a community-wide open house benefit for David Charles Shelter, a Ridgefield man who is currently battling a flesh-eating bacteria called necrotizing fascitis which is caused by a strain of strep bacteria. The family, which includes Mindy Shelter, Charle's wife, and their newborn baby boy, has no insurance.

The cost will be $4 for adults and $2 for children. For more information, call the Fairgate Inn at 834-0861.